

## **Adaplastics: forming the Zazie dans le metro network**

Blin-Rolland, Armelle

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## **Adaplastics: Forming the *Zazie dans le métro* Network**

Armelle Blin-Rolland

*School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures, Bangor University, Bangor, Wales*

School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures, Bangor University, Bangor LL57 2DG, Wales, UK.

[a.blin-rolland@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:a.blin-rolland@bangor.ac.uk)

Armelle Blin-Rolland is a Lecturer in French and Francophone Studies at Bangor University. Her research interests include adaptation from/into *bande dessinée*, literature, film and theatre; theories of ‘voice’ across media; audiovisuality; intermediality; and Breton comic art. She has published on these topics in *European Comic Art*, *Studies in Comics*, *Studies in French Cinema* and *Modern Languages Open*. Her monograph *Adapted Voices: Transpositions of Céline’s ‘Voyage au bout de la nuit’ and Queneau’s ‘Zazie dans le métro’* was published by Legenda in 2015. She is review co-editor for *European Comic Art*.

# Adaplastics: Forming the *Zazie dans le métro* Network

## ABSTRACT

This article posits the productivity, and arguably the necessity, of ‘adapthinking’ *Zazie dans le métro* as it turns sixty. Bringing into contact Adaptation Studies and Catherine Malabou’s concept of plasticity, it develops an ‘adaplastics’ to explore the vortical movements (a notion inspired by Britta H. Sjogren and Michel Serres) of six French-language Zazic texts: Raymond Queneau’s novel, Louis Malle’s film, Jacques Carelman’s and Clément Oubrierie’s *bandes dessinées*, Sarah Mesguich’s play, and Evelyne Levasseur’s audio-book. The article focuses on forming processes (in the triple plastic sense of giving, receiving, and exploding form) of *Zazie* as a con/textual network, exploring the dismantling/re-assembling of a plastic original in the audio-book, the plasticity of forms of Marcel/ine’s gender and *le type*’s identity, and the collision of comic art and dance. It concludes with the suggestion that plasticity offers a mutable philosophical framework that opens a way towards the future and becoming of the study of adaptation as processes of transformation, (ex)change and metamorphosis.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article se penche sur la productivité, et peut-être la nécessité, d’ ‘adapenser’ *Zazie dans le métro* à l’aube de son soixantième anniversaire. En mettant en contact l’étude de l’adaptation et le concept de plasticité de Catherine Malabou, il développe une ‘adaplastique’ pour explorer les mouvements tourbillonnants (une notion inspirée de Britta H. Sjogren et Michel Serres) de six textes zaziques francophones: le roman de Raymond Queneau, le film de Louis Malle, les bandes dessinées de Jacques Carelman et Clément Oubrierie, la pièce de Sarah Mesguich, et ‘le livre qui parle’ d’Evelyne Levasseur. L’analyse se concentre sur les processus de formation (dans le triple sens plastique de donner, recevoir et exploser la forme) de *Zazie* comme réseau con/textuel, explorant le démantèlement/réassemblage d’un original plastique dans le livre qui parle, la plasticité des formes du genre de Marcel/ine et de l’identité du personnage du type, et la collision de la bande dessinée et la danse. En conclusion, cet article suggère que la plasticité offre un concept philosophique mutable qui nous ouvre une voie vers l’avenir et le devenir de l’étude de l’adaptation comme processus de transformation, (é)change et métamorphose.

Keywords: *Zazie dans le métro*; adaptation; plasticity; Catherine Malabou; vortex; Clément Oubrierie; Sarah Mesguich

## Introduction

What is *Zazie dans le métro* today, sixty years after the publication of Queneau’s novel?

A seminal ‘roman parlant’ (to use Jérôme Meizoz’ term [2001]), it is a popular classic and a cultural reference. *Zazie* is also an expanding network of texts across time,

languages and media, of which we can mention new editions of the novel (with new covers, and sometimes illustrations), translations, audio-books, comic books, plays, a musical – and, of course, Louis Malle’s 1960 film adaptation. That Malle’s film, released only one year after the publication of the novel, has stood as a key visual intertext for readers and subsequent adapters points us towards the productivity – and, arguably, the necessity – of what we could term adapthinking *Zazie*. This implies, turning around Linda Hutcheon’s call for treating ‘adaptations *as adaptations*’ (original emphasis, 2012, xvi), dealing with Queneau’s novel *as an adapted text*, as ‘not only an autonomous work’ (2012, xvi) but also part and parcel of a network of interconnecting *Zazie* texts with their own intertexts and contexts. Gesturing, following John Bryant in his theorisation of the ‘fluid text’, towards ‘not only the validity, but also the necessity of adaptation studies in the analysis of texts, writing and culture’ (2013, 49), this poses the question of whether we can talk about what *Zazie* is today without considering it as a multiplicity – implying that talking about *Zazie* at 60 inherently means asking how it has changed and is changing through adaptation. Adapthinking *Zazie* therefore relates to approaches that, understanding texts as unstable rather than static, see them as being in motion and undergoing constant transformation, as in dialogic and intertextual approaches to literature, or, to refer specifically to adaptations theories, ideas of ‘drift’ (Hodgkins 2012) or ‘travel’ (Della Coletta 2012).

My contribution to this debate will be in the bringing into contact Adaptation Studies and Catherine Malabou’s concept of plasticity, which affirms the ‘migratoire et métamorphique’ movement of being as becoming (2004a, 31). This article will attempt to elaborate what I call ‘adaplastics’, the key idea of which is to study adaptation as textual and contextual (con/textual) trans-formation. Adaplastics refers to the forming (in the triple Malabouean sense of deforming, reforming and exploding) of a network through a

vortical dynamic. The image of the vortex, for which I am drawing inspiration from Britta H. Sjogren and Michel Serres, enables us to explore movements of ‘back’ and ‘forth’ and potential collision in the process of creating and experiencing adaptation. This will be examined through interconnections between six French-language *Zazie* texts: Queneau’s novel, Malle’s film, Jacques Carelman’s 1966 and Clément Oubrierie’s 2006 *bandes dessinées*, the 2010 audio-book version of Evelyne Levasseur’s 1989 play, and Sarah Mesguich’s 2015 play. As we dive ‘into the vortex’ (to use the title of Sjogren’s book) of the *Zazie* network, following on from voices that constantly ‘rethink’ adaptation as a cultural practice and phenomenon,<sup>1</sup> this article will aim to – using plasticity’s lexicon – further explode and regenerate questions of ‘original’ and ‘version’. I will suggest talking of plastic original and form(s) that interconnect in multi-linear and plurivectoral movements and explore this in relation to Levasseur’s *Zazie* as a *roman parlant* becoming a *livre qui parle*, the characterological plasticity of Marcel/ine and *le type* in adaptation, and colliding motions of drawing *Zazie* (in Oubrierie’s *bande dessinée*) and dancing *Zazie* (in Mesguich’s play). This is an approach whereby the comparative model that has so long shaped Adaptation Studies (and from which the field is moving away) becomes transformative. To borrow from Sjogren again, the analysis will in a sense be vortical itself, the issues raised ‘inexorably [relating] back to one another, refracting and spiraling’ (2006, 19) – forming in and out of each other, that is to say adapting throughout.

### **Adaplastics**

What might it mean to think about adaptation through what Malabou has posited as the ‘schème moteur’ of our era (2005, 107)? In a Malabouean sense, plasticity ‘désigne à la fois la capacité à *recevoir la forme* (l’argile, la terre glaise par exemple sont dites “plastiques”) et la capacité à *donner la forme* (comme dans les arts ou la chirurgie plastiques)’; crucially, it ‘se caractérise aussi par sa puissance d’anéantissement de la

forme' (as in the French *plastic* and *plastiquage*). As such, plasticity refers to both the emergence and annihilation of form: it is situated 'entre deux extrêmes, d'un côté la figure sensible qui est la prise de forme (la sculpture ou les objets plastiques), de l'autre côté la destruction de toute forme (l'explosion)' (original emphases, 2005, 25-26). This has led Malabou to expand her philosophical enquiry into neuroscience and turn her attention to what she terms 'la plasticité destructrice', the 'double sombre de la plasticité positive [qui] forme par anéantissement de la forme' (2007, 15).

A point of entry into thinking about adaptation plastically is offered to us by Carolyn Shread, who is one of Malabou's translators into English, and has introduced the concept to Translation Studies, a field with which Adaptation Studies entertains a relationship of productive dis/similarity. Shread theorises 'plastic translation' in terms that find an evident echo with adaptation. Translation is 'the dislocation of a text's form, the possibility of its plastic reformulation' (2011, 126) as 'the text withdraws to engender new forms' (2014, 63). Translation 'enacts and embodies plastic change' (2011, 142), 're-engenders through the creation of new relational exchanges' (2014, 67). Beyond the 'plastic equilibrium between a giving and a receiving of form', understanding translation plastically also implies recognising that it is 'bound [to] a degree of destruction', and the 'change of course that may occur to any text in translation [as] a change beyond difference' (2012, vii-viii).

How, from here, do we bring plasticity's lexicon of a triple dynamic of giving, receiving and exploding form into contact with adaptation? This involves viewing adaptation as an explosive re-articulation through which form concomitantly emerges and disappears, thereby rethinking the absence/presence interplay that is constitutive of the making and experiencing of con/textual transformation and (ex)change. Our *Zazie* adaptations regenerate and re-engender *Zazie*, con/texts give form to and receive form

from each other, and texts implode and explode into networks. Circling back to our adapthinking approach, now *Zazie* ‘n’est rien que le change de ses formes, l’être n’est rien que sa mutabilité’ (Malabou 2005, 83). A plastic understanding of adaptation also provides us with a fresh take on cornerstone questions of media specificity, as we move further away from a comparative model exploring variations of Seymour Chatman’s 1980 analysis of ‘what novels can do that films can’t (and vice versa)’. Going beyond a play of similarities and differences between *formed* texts and media, we see texts and media *forming* in and out of each other in a process of trans-formation. We view intermedial gaps and ‘automatic difference’ (Stam 2005, 16), shifting our understanding of negative space from Derridean *écriture* to Malabouean plasticity, as ‘bien des écarts, mais des écarts susceptibles de prendre forme’ (original emphasis, 2005, 112), an idea to which I will return in particular in an adaplastic analysis of *Zazie bande dessinée* and dance.

At this stage, it is important to explicate why a focus on ‘form’ is productive rather than limiting for the study of adaptation. At first glance, it would seem to focus only on one side of what Kamilla Elliott (2014) has termed the ‘formal/cultural and textual/contextual divides’ in the field. However, we are cutting texts neither off context(s) nor content (Elliot talks of content as having been ‘released into and redefined as context’ in cultural studies [2014, 581]). If we were to understand form as the ‘contour’ of the ‘essence’ of a text, this would ultimately mean that the best an adaptation can do, in the face of largely ‘incompatible [...] ontologies’, is ‘to try to be truthful to the spirit of the original work’, as in Pascal Lefèvre’s approach to comic-to-film transpositions (2007, 5). By contrast, form in a Malabouean sense is not ‘une peau, un vêtement, un atour, que l’on peut toujours quitter sans que l’essentiel soit altéré’ (2009b, 23) as a text’s content is displaced into a new form. Moreover, a focus on *forming*, on the dynamics of

giving, receiving and exploding form at play in the network of changing texts that are nothing but their plasticity, must recognise this as a con/textual process.

A collision of the representation of Blackness in Oubrierie's and Carelman's *Zazie* comics enacts this. In one panel of Carelman's *bande dessinée*, *Zazie* turns into a racist stereotype: she has black skin and bones in her now-curly hair, seemingly as a visualisation of the 'vorace' way in which she eats her meal (1966, 26). In Oubrierie's *Zazie*, Marcel/ine is Black, which the adapter was made to justify as a non-issue and as in no way 'going against' Queneau's novel, in reply to Elisabeth Chamontin's view of Marcel/ine's skin colour and lack of visible gender ambiguity as a 'strange' transformation ('elle devient étrangement') in her broader criticism of what she questions as 'une Zazie politiquement correcte' (Oubrierie 2009). Two interrelated points can be made here: first, this reminds us of the importance of *form* in a visual and popular medium that has always been intertwined with questions of the overt or covert representation of ideology and politics (for a seminal analysis of this in the French-language context, see McKinney 2008). We may here adapt Ann Cooper Albright's words on dance to view comics as 'being both produced by and producing cultural discourses' (1997, xxiii), in this case of race, and, to a lesser extent, gender (we will return in more detail to the question of gender, and to the relation between dance and comics, later in this article). This is seen here in relation specifically to processes of drawing (on) a racist imagery (a plastic dynamic of giving and receiving form), while the medium offers the possibility to '[craft] new representations' (Wanzo 2015, 316) (a plastic dynamic of exploding and regenerating form).<sup>2</sup> The second point is that this discussion, which does not relate to differing visions of the same scene by the two adapters, has nothing to do with the content of Queneau's novel and everything to do with its plasticity – its mutability beyond itself, its transformation beyond difference. This reinforces the view that adaptation is not



limited to a novel-to-BD (or, as is still often the case, novel-to-film) transposition, but is more productively understood as a formal *and* cultural process. Plasticity gives us a conceptual toolbox to articulate and explore this as a triple dynamic of con/textual forming.

As such, adaplastics both follows and departs from Bryant's ground-breaking concept of the 'fluid text', which refers to 'any work that exists in multiple versions in which the primary cause of those versions is some form of revision' (2013, 48). A shift from fluidity to plasticity enables us to re-think the relationship between the ultimately amorphous fluid text (fluids take the shape of their container) and its versions. Plasticity is the union between fluidity and resistance (Malabou 1996, 26), and as such brings a productively contradictory dimension of emergence/explosion, solidity/suppleness to the study of adaptation. What is plastic does take shape (there are *Zazie* imprints), but this process of (de)(re)formation is un-final (the *Zazie* imprints can transform). The shift from fluidity to plasticity can be understood as that from a Derridean to a Malabouean approach. Bryant explains that 'fluid text editing attempts to *trace* the phenomenon of textual evolution' (my emphasis, 2002, 51). As such, fluid texts are 'a constant "deferral"' of the literary work itself [and] the history of textual revision and versions can [therefore] be seen as an enactment of deconstruction' (2002, 10). Malabouean plasticity, which emerges at the dusk of Derridean *écriture*, interrupts 'le tracé de la trace' and substitutes it with 'la formation de la forme' (2009a, 76).

This implies a different approach to our (adapters', experiencers') encounters with texts.<sup>3</sup> Bryant states that 'our fullest exposure to a fluid text is through textual scholarship and scholarly editions of literary works' (2002, 17), in the perception of the textual traces of cultural revision left on the version that we are experiencing. In adaplastics our perspective shifts from constant deferral, to encountering and engaging with adaptation

as the formation of form, in emergence and disappearance, and implosion/explosion into a network. Adaptation can then be understood as enacting and reworking ‘*traces [qui] prennent forme*’ (original emphasis, Malabou 2005, 112) – an idea which brings a fruitful perspective to the Genettian/Hutcheon image of the palimpsest (Hutcheon 2012, 6). This will lead us to move from the Derridean concept of the trace of a non-origin, to the idea of a plastic original whose being is nothing but its mutability and its changes of form. This does not mean moving backwards to an ‘original’ or a metaphysics of presence, as the originary movement constituting the plastic original (that is not the ‘original’) is its transformation in and out of other texts. In this way, adaplastics follows on from Elliot’s dissatisfaction with what she terms *différance*’s ‘neither/nor’ of ‘terms that negate each other, fading from trace to trace until they (nearly) cancel each other out’ (2003, 215) – a dimension that is also found in Albright Cooper’s writings on dance, when she points out that ‘Derrida leaves us no room to discuss the way this presence [of the dancer’s physical body] can be palpable, indeed, powerful, in the midst of its own erasure’ (1997, 97).

The network, much like a Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizomatic map, is ‘connectable dans toutes ses dimensions, démontable, renversable, susceptible de recevoir constamment des modifications [et] toujours à entrées multiples’ (1980, 20). Texts retain their ability to change in the ways in which they are (re)read and (re)written in and out of (their) context(s), the – to adapt Julie Sanders’ words – ever-expanding network(s) of con/textual relations into which they implode and explode.<sup>4</sup> We therefore cannot limit ourselves to a linear formation, from Queneau’s *Zazie*, to Malle’s, Carelman’s, Levasseur’s, Oubrière’s, and finally to Mesguich’s, and this is where I would suggest it is productive to bring in the image of the vortex. A vortical, transformative encounter between Malle’s film and Carelman’s *bande dessinée* offers an initial example of this. Two strikingly dis/similar scenes in these texts, when Zazie and Charles walk down the

Eiffel tower stairs, feature a literal spiralling shape. In the film, the synchronisation between voices and bodies is loose (as throughout the film), and as Zazie utters her borderline meta-comment on not knowing ‘pourquoi qu’on dit des choses et pas d’autres’ (Queneau 1959, 87; on this see Bernofsky 1994), sound and image are fast-forwarded, the parodic film arranger drawing our attention to its unreliable and subversive process of breaking the frame (Hedges 1991, 10). As part of the film’s broader movement of revealing itself as film by pointing to its malleable processes of fabrication, filmic voices emerge from filmic bodies precisely because they do not come from them (see Blin-Rolland 2015). This relates to Malle’s explosion and re-generation of film language (‘within and without of the New Wave’ [Frey 2005, 11]), and to what we can call, borrowing Katerina Thomadaki’s expression, the plasticity of spectatorship (2015): this film that exploded film language in turn exploded like a ‘tonneau de dynamite en pleine figure des gens’ (Hervée, Peltier and Rappeneau 2005), seemingly asking too much of an adaptive encounter to its early audiences. It then became a cult film (French and Malle 1993, 29) for viewers that embraced its de/re-formation of cinematic grammar.

Carelman’s *bande dessinée*, which is in fact halfway between comic and illustrated novel as it retains the entirety of Queneau’s novel while dislocating it into sections placed generally under, sometimes around the images, offers a visualisation of *Zazie* that in places so echoes Malle’s that it appears as much as an adaptation of the film as of the novel. We find what looks like a *bande dessinée* version of the filmic Eiffel Tower scene (1966, 44): where the film speeds up Zazie and Charles’ walk, the comic renders their movement by decomposing it into stages and multiplying the characters. Selected excerpts from Zazie and Charles’ conversation, namely Zazie’s questioning of Charles’ sexuality, feature in speech balloons as ‘emergent’ text (to use Neil Cohn’s term [2013, 36]). Next to the image, the entirety of their conversation is reproduced, including

Zazie's borderline meta-comment, which bounces back and forth between text and image, novel, film and *bande dessinée*. Zazie says the things she says because she is a character in a book that is typed, as we know, by a 'romancier idiot' whose presence emerges as it is erased with Gabriel's 'oh! pardon' (Queneau 1959, 90), which is also an impossible spiralling refraction/deflection of literary voice(s) between narrator and character. She is now a character in an adaptation of a book that is also an adaptation of a film, as any 'originary' (always already plastic) source duplicates, triplicates, explodes. There is, of course, a clear line of influence from Queneau's *Zazie* to Malle's to Carelman's, but we have three texts forming in and out of each other – spiralling around and on each other in a vortical movement.

The vortex is a suggestive image, used notably by Sjogren as a non-structuring movement in her analysis of the female voice in film to render a dynamic of repetition, contradiction and paradox (2006). It enables us to retain a sense of 'textual fluidity', but with an explicit dimension of turbulence.<sup>5</sup> The vortex ('tourbillon') is a recurrent image for Michel Serres, who writes that 'le tourbillon, instable et stable, fluctuant et en équilibre, est ordre et désordre à la fois, il détruit les vaisseaux en mer, il est la formation des choses' (1977, 40-41), an evocative formulation in which we find again contradictory forces of creation/destruction. As Steven Connor (2008) points out, the image of the vortex, 'which both turns on itself and yet also has a forward trajectory', evokes the capacity 'to bend back on itself, recycling, recoiling the better to spring forward, deriving new impetus from backward looks'. Connor is here talking about Serres' writing, but his words certainly echo with adaptive (trans)formative encounters. This nonlinear vortical movement enables us perhaps to turn anew to and see a swirling motion in what Hutcheon describes as 'a conceptual flipping back and forth between the work we know and the work we are experiencing' (2012, 139) in adaptation. As con/texts implode and explode

into network(s) and we shift from a palimpsest of traces to the formation of form, our ‘juxtaposed readings’ (Sanders 2006, 25) become spiralling readings, and our oscillation between texts (Hutcheon 2012, 172) holds the potential for collision. It is towards this that adaplastics gestures, as an approach to the vortical movement of texts (across languages, space and time) that proposes to re-think adaptation as a textual, contextual and cultural process of transformation as formation/explosion.

### **Plastic original**

With adaplastics now taking shape, let us turn to the relationship between ‘source text’ and adaptation, which I will attempt to re-think in terms of plastic original and form(s). Our point of entry into this is *Zazie*’s famous opening, ‘Doukipudonktan’, whereby ‘d’emblée [the novel] exhibe son project: transcription de l’oral et subversion de l’écrit et du genre romanesque’ (Bénard 1994, 135). This is a linguistic agglomeration so emblematic of *Zazie*’s most striking feature in its literary form that Chris Andrews in fact sees it as a ‘reduction’ of Queneau (1999, 377), which we may nuance by seeing it as so quotable and quoted that it has formed as a Zazic imprint. ‘Doukipudonktan’ is the first utterance in four out of our five *Zazie* adaptations. In Malle’s film, that its eruption is both vocalised by, and loosely connected to, Philippe Noiret’s Gabriel already points towards the productive disjunction between cinematic voices and bodies, soundtrack and imagertrack, that is an integral part of Malle’s explosive re-articulation of film language and form through adaptation as experimental practice. In Mesguich’s play, the stage is in the dark apart from a spotlight on Gabriel, who sniffs and produces his Barbouze perfume bottle before saying (rather than thinking in a recorded voice-over, which is occasionally used elsewhere in the play) ‘Doukipudonktan’, the play from the outset staging its status as a performance of an adaptation (Gabriel’s ‘oh! pardon’ will later turn into an apology to the stage director for mis-attributing authorship to a ‘romancier idiot’). In Carelman’s

*Zazie* (1966, 3), ‘Doukipudonktan’ is posited as an emblematic quotation within the adaptation itself, doubly featuring in the textual section and in Gabriel’s thought balloon in the image (see Blin-Rolland 2015, 94). In Oubrierie’s *bande dessinée* (2006, 3), ‘Doukipudonktan’ emerges as if from the text itself as much as from Gabriel, who is present but unseen in a long shot in the first panel of a page of comics adaptation images we may read through a dynamic of im/mobility. The static comics images move with the reader’s ‘*rapiécage*’ of the comics fragments (to borrow experimental comics artist Balkaen’s expression [original emphasis, 2016, 8]) and animation of the graphic traces (to use Philippe Marion’s concept [1993]); the emblematic *Zazie* images (‘Doukipudonktan’, *Zazie*’s obsession with the *métro*, which is framed in the last panel of the first three pages) move as we experience a new adaptation taking form.

Seeing ‘Doukipudonktan’ as an imprint of a plastic text means that it is both *already* formed and *still* changing form. *Zazie* in its novel-shape may already be read through the lens of adaptation, in the transposition of spoken language into literary language, or perhaps rather their mutual trans-formation. Literary language (re)forms as it is deformed and subverted by spoken French in a text that calls upon its readers to engage in an adaptive encounter and to ‘[taste] it on the tongue’ (O’Sullivan 2002, 275). Johanne Bénard, in a statement that would extend to all *Zazie* adaptations that include sound, points out that ‘le film et ses replis sont impuissants à traduire ces petites secousses du langage zazique’ (1994, 152). How, however, could we deplore that a novel that discloses its metamorphic movement from its outset has lost something in trans-formation – that it has transformed? *Zazie* loses form as it takes form, takes form as it loses form in adaptation – necessary gains and losses (Hutcheon 2012, 16; Stam 2000, 62) are part of the originary process of plastic change. Each *Zazie* text can be said to ‘[exhiber] son projet’ from the outset, and this project may be designated with a deceptively simple

formulation: adapting *Zazie* into *bande dessinée*, film, theatre – taking part in the forming of the *Zazie* network, whereby texts regenerate and re-engender each other.

How, then, should we think of the *Zazie* text that these adaptations adapt? The movement of a text being adapted is part and parcel of why we watch, read and enjoy adaptations, of both the pleasure and frustration with which they provide us (Hutcheon 2012, 21). We know – perhaps most acutely from Derrida's writing on translation – that any talk of an 'original' necessitates inverted commas. What, then, can we call this text that we come to see change – a 'source', 'originating', 'founding' text? Even 'adapted work' gives a sense of a completed process and of passivity to what is mutual exchange and transformation, missing out on what Thomas Leitch (2009) has analysed as an intransitive approach to thinking adaptation. I would suggest the concept of plastic original here. This dual term, invoking a text that is not original but that emerges from 'une modifiabilité originaire' (Malabou 2009a, 76), enables us to do away with the inverted commas that must necessarily frame an 'original', and to bring to the text that is adapted/adapting plasticity's inherent contradictory movement between emergence and disappearance, formation and explosion. By plastic original, I mean the text that we reread and rewrite in adaptation, that takes and loses form through the migratory and metamorphic movement of being as becoming-plastic that adaptation enacts. The plastic original is the text that we see become dis/similar to itself and potentially change beyond difference – though we may in fact resist its deformation in adaptation and attempt to revert back to what Julie Grossman calls the 'home text', with the connotations of comfort and confinement the term implies (2015, 19). The forming of the plastic original happens *at the same time* as that of the adaptation, which does not end with its completion as product. The idea of a plastic original does not imply limiting ourselves to a one-to-one relationship from 'source' to adaptation (as the idea of originary modifiability refers to

texts always forming in and out others), nor does it mean reverting back to coming to the adaptation for what it is not (the ‘original’) – but precisely to come to it for what it is, a transformation. Queneau’s *Zazie* is a potent example here, not only in the metamorphic movements between spoken and written language, but also more broadly as a text confounding its readers as it takes form – as a text of, as Barthes pointed out, duplicity, antiphrasis, uncertainty and confusion (1994).

If Levasseur’s audio-book is the *Zazie* text from our corpus that, as we will see, most evidently draws attention to what it is doing to and with the plastic original, Oubrerie’s *bande dessinée* provides us a way into discussing the status of Queneau’s novel as canonical. Oubrerie’s *Zazie* was published as part of Gallimard’s *Fétiche* collection, in which comics artists choose and adapt works from the publisher’s back catalogue. In addition to relating to the question of adaptation reflecting and inflecting the changing relationship between literature and comics (on which see for instance Versaci 2007), this enacts the idea of the literary canon as non-originary and unstable plastic originals to be potentialised in adaptation. Indeed, the literary canon can be productively understood as plastic itself – in the movements in and through which it forms, deforms, reforms as a con/textual network or ‘constellation’ (Dean Kolbas 2001), movements through which it can implode and explode, as seen most prominently perhaps during the ‘canon wars’.<sup>6</sup> Adaptation, of course, holds a key role in canon formation; Sanders in particular discusses the ways in which it requires and perpetuates the canon, as well as holding the potential to reform and challenge it (2006, 8-9). Oubrerie gives us insights into the *Zazie* adaptive process on his blog, documenting adaptation taking shape, including as sketches. He explains that having chosen to adapt *Zazie*, he found himself struggling to extricate his adaptation as it was emerging from Malle’s (2009), which so imprinted the plastic original he was rereading and rewriting. Adapting Queneau’s novel



here implies moving away from, and arguably adapting *against* Malle's film in the making of what is, rather uniquely, a realist *Zazie*. We find here a process of adapting a plastic original whose originary modifiability has dissolved its status as 'original' in the con/textual formation of a canonical novel-film text, and as such, Malle's film retroactive influence on the novel can be viewed as a vortical dynamic of plastic forming.

### **When a *roman parlant* becomes a *livre qui parle***

Levasseur's audio-book presents us with a playful reflection on this interplay between textual emergence and disappearance in adaptation. In the opening track that precedes the usually inaugural 'Doukipudonktan', inter/textual and con/textual movements are brought to the fore from the outset. A male voice first hums excerpts from the Queneau-penned, Ronsard-inspired, and Juliette Gréco-performed 'C'est bien connu'/'Si tu t'imagines', the 'fillette' of the poem-song becoming a reference to *Zazie*. There is then a re-voicing of Marguerite Duras' 1959 interview of Queneau (an example of 'contextual framing', to use Wolf's term [2006, 16], that here becomes *textual* framing), to which are added references to Alice and Gavroche as the interviewer attempts to get the writer to define who *Zazie* is. At the end of the opening track, the interviewer asks Queneau if it is time to 'remettre les pendules à l'heure', which triggers the sound of bells ringing, after which we get to 'Doukipudonktan', uttered by *Zazie*, who is still at the station where she was left at the end of the novel, but from which her mother has not picked her up.

What follows is a *Zazie* text that oscillates between sequel and adaptation in the orchestration of the meta/fictional encounter between 'author' and 'character'. Queneau meets *Zazie* at the station, and the audio-book alternates between sequel moments in which *Zazie* tells Queneau what happened during the novel, and adaptation moments in which they re-enact changed passages from it, *Zazie* largely acting 'as herself' and Queneau variously taking on the roles – and lines – of characters, primarily Gabriel and

*le type*. The text of the novel is constantly shuffled in terms of order, and of who says what (a process that already occurs in Malle's film, and is here taken to vortical extremes), and new text is also added (we can note a reference to *Chêne et chien* [1937] when Queneau takes on *le type*'s 'racontouse').

This is, evidently, a 'highly self-reflexive and resolutely metareferential' text, as is the case with many sequels (Jess-Cooke and Verevis 2010, 4). Thinking in terms of a plastic original is productive in relation to the dual question of what it is that Levasseur's *Zazie* follows/adapts, and how the audio-book is experienced as a sequel/adaptation. This *Zazie* text is a recorded studio performance of a stage adaptation of Queneau's novel, and we also see an influence of Malle's *Zazie* on the audio-book's cover. Intertextual references from the opening track frame *Zazie* as part of a network of un-stable and non-originary texts. This confirms the impossibility of pinning down the 'original' of a text that is nonetheless centred around the idea of something after which it comes *and* that (it) changes – a text that so clearly plays with a Deleuzian (2015) understanding of repetition as repetition of difference (on adaptation as 'repetition with difference', see Hutcheon [2012, 142]). It is fruitful here to pay attention to the material format of the audio-book: it is published by Le livre qui parle, and the spine identifies it as an audio-book version of Queneau's novel (Levasseur's name does not appear). We find ourselves with an audio-book that is a studio recording of a play that is an adaptation of a novel, an audio-book (that is not a recording reading of a novel) that is a sound sequel/adaptation of a (canonical, already adapted) book. This is in a sense the audio-book not of a book that is being read, but of a text that is *reread* and *rewritten* in sound.

The 'roman parlant' (to use Meizoz's term [2001]) now talks, becoming-plastic in adaptation in a vortical movement of forming/dismantling. *Zazie* saying 'Doukipudonktan' triggers a constant dynamic of (ex)change between the forming audio-

book and the deforming plastic original, ending with Laverdure's famous refrain about characters' propensity to do nothing but talk, now uttered by Zazie and repeated and distorted as malleable sound material to the point of becoming unintelligible. Throughout, this *Zazie* text centres around the very plasticity of that which it adapts and that which is adapting, taking shape in the dis/re-assembling of a sound/textual form that continually revises itself. In a (post-structuralist) explosion and re-generation of authorship as unstable and participative, that Zazie, now a famous and iconic figure, appears as Queneau's 'hideous progeny' points to the contradictory plastic process of authorship itself, achieved as creation as it dissolves as control.<sup>7</sup> The audio-book engages its listener in a vortical movement of shuffling, constantly drawing her attention to what is said how and by whom, to the migratory and metamorphic movement of the plastic original she is rereading, that emerges as it disappears. The experience of the meta/fictional encounter between author and character in this *roman parlant* becoming a *livre qui parle* therefore forms a playful Zazie reflection on quotability, the dialogicality of all utterances, authorship, and the mutability of texts in adaptation – and in reading.

### **The form(s) of Marcel/ine and *le type***

From the idea of a plastic original, we can now turn to thinking of the adaptations themselves in terms of form(s), which enables us to retain a sense of 'version' as well as emphasise the idea of a process. This is productively explored through the mutations of two characters who transform within the diegesis, Marcel/ine and *le type*. We can start here from what S. Pearl Brilmyer has analysed as the 'special plasticity of *literary* character' (original emphasis), the movement through which characters, as 'loosely bounded, not entirely individuated figures' that are 'highly sensitive to encounter', are able to be formed and reformed by readers (2015). Pearl Brilmyer contrasts this with the lack of 'vagueness' in painting, according to which thinking visual *Zazie* adaptations

would then ‘set’ or ‘fix’ the characters’ forms (a word/image discourse that Elliott [2003] deconstructs in her re-thinking of the novel/film debate). Retaining the idea of characterological plasticity, without seeing the visual as ‘lacking’ something that would be contained in the literary, enables us to turn instead to the plasticity of characters in adaptation. In a vortical dynamic, in the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous, the characters in adaptation(s) are not variations of a core form that would be transposed or displaced, but form(s) characterised by constant mutability. Characterological plasticity is, then, in the potential to transform between and across time, contexts, and media in the movement of becoming.

Marcel/ine poses an evident ‘inter-semiotic translation problem’ to adapters since the character’s gender seems to be revealed as male at the end of the novel, but its ambiguity is retained due to this ‘vagueness’ of language. I have argued elsewhere that Marcel/ine’s gender is un-finalised rather than revealed in the novel, and that Carelman’s text/image version can be read as reinforcing sexual difference between male and female voices (2015). This points us back/forth to adaptation’s potential, as discussed in relation to the literary canon, as a force for perpetuation as much as for subversion. In the broader *Zazie* network, I would argue that adaptation, understood as a process of forming, can enact and rework the plasticity of gender, even when specific adaptations tend towards viewing and confining it as stable, either/or categories. A plastic, anti-essentialising understanding of gender echoes Judith Butler’s (with whom Malabou co-wrote *Sois mon corps* [2009]) theorisation of gender and woman as ‘a term in process, a becoming, a construction that cannot rightfully be said to originate or end’ (1990, 43). Indeed, Malabou talks of how ‘le féminin ou la femme [...], en demeurant l’une des modalités incontournables du change ontologique, deviennent eux-mêmes des lieux passants et métaboliques de l’identité, qui donnent à voir, comme d’autres, le passage inscrit au cœur

du genre' (2009a, 49). With this in mind, we can look at Marcel/ine's gender as it is formed *now* in adaptation, while understanding it as situated in a broader movement of forming. Marcel/ine is Marceline in Mesguich's play, in which her homo-erotic encounter with Mado is mirrored by Charles and Turandot's kiss, as Charles and Mado now both explicitly enter a heteronormative union. Marcel/ine is Albertine in Malle's film, in which any stability or coherence is exploded and collapsed anyway. Marcel/ine returns as Marcel in Oubrierie's *bande dessinée*, in a panel in which we only see the character's gloved hand (2006, 71) – Marcel is off-panel, and Marcel/ine in the interframe space to which comics readers give shape. In this regard, Catherine Labio rightly points out that the terms *intercases* or *entr'images* have the 'merit of not evoking a vacuum', unlike *blanc intericonique* (which is favoured in French-language criticism), which fits with the plastic understanding of gaps as able to take form, as we will return to below (2015, 335).

What of Troussaillon, Pédro-surplus, Bertin Poirée, Aroun Arachide – Queneau's 'personnage essentiel' (Duras 1959)? His multiple names, or very lack thereof as *le type*, points us towards the 'vagueness' of his form, or rather the plastic possibilities of a character whose identity is at any point transformational. *Le type*'s being is nothing but its mutability and instability, even as Aroun Arachide, supposedly his 'real' identity: 'Je suis je, celui que vous avez connu et parfois mal reconnu. Prince de ce monde et de plusieurs territoires connexes, il me plaît de parcourir mon domaine sous des aspects variés en prenant les apparences de l'incertitude et de l'erreur qui, d'ailleurs, me sont propres' (Queneau 1959, 184). Characterological plasticity, being as becoming, is again enacted in adaptation. In Malle's film, Aroun Arachide appears as a meta-cinematic dictator – yet his latest, and supposedly final, form dissolves in the monovectorality of filmic images, as he returns once more as a nameless ticket collector. In the audio-book *le type* is another voice to be put on by his (fictional) 'romancier idiot', which is added to

the list of his aspects and appearances in a speech that now reveals a *changed* ‘true’ identity. In Mesguich’s *Zazie*, he is a part (or parts) to be played in an adaptation that stages its own status as a performance. In Oubrierie’s *bande dessinée*, his transformation into a comics being involves a productively dissonant relationship between text and image: in one panel, his voice-over in the *récitatif* talks of his various ‘images fuyantes’, and the non-fugitive comics image features him as a multi-headed figure, in which the reader trans-linearly recognises his (previous) forms as (non-)simultaneous (2006, 69).<sup>8</sup> An adaplastics approach moves us from David L. Gobert’s novel-focused view of *le type*’s ‘identity [as being masked] by diversity’ (1986, 95-96), to see his disguises as ‘masques à transformation’ (see Malabou 2005, 13-16), his being nothing but its plasticity, and his (inter)(trans)medial metamorphosis as, rather than the displacement of his essence into new forms, a process of change.

### **Drawing *Zazie*, dancing *Zazie***

To move further beyond a sense of transposition as displacement and into an exploration of non-predetermined and un-final mutations, as well as away from Adaptation Studies’ long-standing focus on transformation from novel to film, let us end on a collision *between* comic and performance, or, more specifically, dance. As already touched upon in relation to ‘Doukipudonktan’, comics adaptation presents us with a productive sense of im/mobility. The moving/still dynamic of *bande dessinée* images, whereby the reader’s eyes ‘[créent] le mouvement’, has been explored notably in comics artist François Olislaeger’s intermedial border crossings in collaboration with choreographer Mathilde Monnier (Favre 2013). Intermedial understandings of medial specificities point us back/forth to the idea of the gaps between media as being able to take form, and we will explore here what can happen, what can form, between two scenes from Oubrierie’s *Zazie* and Mesguich’s play of an early encounter between *Zazie* and Turandot. This occurs the

evening before Zazie leaves Gabriel and Marcel/ine's flat and accuses Turandot, who is trying to stop her, of telling her 'des choses sales' (Queneau 1959, 34). In the *bande dessinée* (2006, 10-12), Turandot leaves, Zazie goes to sleep, Marcel/ine tells Gabriel he has forgotten his lipstick; a wordless page shows Zazie waking up and leaving the flat, and Zazie's accusation of Turandot is then recounted by him in panels with an altered colour palette and rounded frame that indicate intradiegetic narration. Zazie in two panels of Turandot's version of the incident is drawn with her arms stretched and her mouth wide open, and her words are filtered through Turandot's *récitatifs* rather than emerging from her in a speech balloon. As we set this in vortical motion by turning to the dancing of this scene, let us bear specific aspects of the comic's form in mind: as throughout, there are constant interframe spaces, and strikingly *crayonné* aesthetics, which Marion (1993) reads as heightening the perception of traces left by the graphiator, to be taken up and animated by the reader.

In Mesguich's play, inserted between Turandot's visit and Zazie's running away in the early morning is a dance sequence in which Turandot stops Zazie (played alternatively by the mid-twenties and younger-looking Léopoldine Serre and Joëlle Luthi) and forces her to engage in a sexual *pas de deux*. He grabs her by the neck and pulls her towards him, touches her breasts, prevents her from escaping, lifts her crotch to his face, Zazie first struggling before curling up into a self-protective foetal position as Turandot lays her down on the floor, and the light fades to black. This dance is sound-tracked by a sustained high-pitched violin sound with dissonant notes that disrupt the scale and create a sense of menace, and a recorded exchange between the two characters' voices as physical manifestations of their movements that are unproduced by their bodies, Turandot asking 'petite, où vas-tu comme ça', Zazie crying 'au secours' and that she 'ne [veut] pas aller avec le monsieur [qui lui a] dit des choses sales' (all from Queneau 1959, 33-34). In

the next scene, Zazie as she is leaving runs past Turandot's bar, and they repeat the same lines in the exchange that we know, and that we now see differently, as what Zazie is saying and Turandot is denying has taken form in front of us in the scene's nightmarish 'dark double'.

The adaptive choice of not only representing but *choreographing* Turandot's attack on Zazie exploits what Cooper Albright has analysed as dance's 'intriguing possibility of being both very abstract and very literal' (1997, 3). As a dance sequence it engages the experiencer differently, heightening kinaesthetic and somatic reactions, and due to the nature of what is taking form in dance, the act of watching arguably transforms into what Cooper Albright calls an 'act of witnessing', which 'implies a responsiveness, the response/ability of the viewer toward the performer' (1997, xxii). This is emphasised by having Zazie and Turandot face the audience at the start of the dance, her distressed and his predatory expression clearly visible. The scene, through dance's productively contradictory forces of abstraction and literalness, confronts us with a disturbing enactment and reworking of Zazie as, in Barthes' words, 'contraction surhumaine de l'enfance et de la maturité' (1994, 1263), as we witness a pubescent girl made into a sexual being. If this turns Zazie into a victim, she also achieves power over her violation in the following scene,<sup>9</sup> her accusation of Turandot becoming a denunciation. Zazie's well-known status as a disruptive force who 'unmasks the hypocrisy' (Gobert 1986, 91) and meta-language (Barthes, 1994) of the adult world now takes form in relation to questions of bodily violence that are choreographed, re-voiced and re-heard in adaptation.

How does this relate to our comic, which we left behind as a rather straightforward version of the scene? The dance sequence is already presented as a negative (in the photographic sense) within the play itself, followed as it is by (triggering as it does) the next exchange between Zazie and Turandot. If, as Cooper Albright stresses, perceiving



dance ‘means more than a flat visual gaze’ (1997, xix), experiencing a comic (adaptation) does not mean passively looking at static images. The *bande dessinée* gives the reader a material void to be filled and mapped, to draw and see in (out of, into) the interframe spaces, as she animates its graphic traces, moves its static images, and forms the network of the comic adaptation. If the dance sequence re-presents what happens in-between, the comic re-presents a gaping form in which bodily violence is un-seen and Zazie’s voice un-heard. The ‘brightest’ *Zazie* text collides with the ‘darkest’ one, the text of static images that we move collides with the text in motion that we decompose, neither of which we stabilise as they migrate and metamorphose, forming in, out of, against each other. Key to the argument here is that what the dance sequence shows is emphatically not present in Oubrierie’s comic as an autonomous work, and a comparative approach would only serve to emphasise this absence. With adaptastics, we collide rather than juxtapose, and we can reflect on the possibilities, not only of the plastic original, but also of adaptations to form/explode/regenerate each other. Spiralling our media’s plasticities, comic art provides us with a materialisation of traces that occur as changes of form and gaps that are able to take shape, and dance with an enactment of con/textual instability.

## **Conclusion**

The opening suggestion of this article, namely the productivity and perhaps necessity of adapthinking *Zazie*, has led us to bring into contact Adaptation Studies and the Malabouean concept of plasticity as a way into the vortex of interconnecting *Zazie* texts. Focusing on ideas of originary modifiability and continual con/textual (de)(re)forming, we explored Levasseur’s audio-book as a *roman parlant* becoming a *livre qui parle*, the instability of Marcel/ine’s gender and *le type*’s identity as (inter)(trans)medially enacted and reworked in adaptation, and a transformative collision between *bande dessinée* and dance in the re-presentation of sexual violence. To draw broader conclusions, I wish to

reflect on interconnections between plasticity as a trans-concept and adaptation as a trans-discipline. The breadth of Malabou's writings and of the applicability and applications of this 'schème moteur' (2007, 107) of our era may lead us to ask whether plasticity is *too* plastic a concept. This is perhaps hinted at by Alexander R. Galloway, who sees Malabou's 'coup [as being] to assert the universality of plasticity' (2012, 10). Yet, rather than dissolving in its own transformability, plasticity's originary and contradictory modifiability points both to the ability to resist endless flexibility,<sup>10</sup> and to the possibility to change beyond difference, potentially becoming unrecognisable to oneself (the destructive consequences of which are explored in *Les Nouveaux blessés* [2007] and *Ontologie de l'accident* [2009b]). This, I would argue, productively echoes with the vitality and mutability, in fact the vitality due to its mutability, of Adaptation Studies, as a discipline that is 'by nature anti-essentialist' (Voigts-Virchow 2013, 64) and has developed through dynamics of exploding and re-generating its foundations, continually (vortically) re-thinking, revising and reformulating the processes of con/textual forming that are its object of study. As part of the field's movements of '[developing] new concepts, new ideas, new theories, and new methodologies through which to study adaptations and discover what we do not yet know about them' (Elliot 2014, 588), I would suggest that bringing it into contact with plasticity potentially points us towards the future and becoming of Adaptation Studies, in the sense that it is a mutable philosophical framework through which we focus always on (ex)change, metamorphosis as transformation rather than displacement, on 'possibles plastiques qui ne sont en réalité jamais finis' (Malabou 2009, 17). As such, circling back to the idea of 'adapthinking', this also affirms adaptation's status as a motor scheme of culture. This adaplastic mapping of *Zazie* has, of course, been only partial; it is hoped that the exploration of vortical movements between Zazic texts over the last sixty years has in turn pointed us back/forth

to the unpredictable mutations of *Zazie* at seventy, eighty, and beyond.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> My use of the term ‘rethinking’ draws directly on the titles of Elliott’s seminal *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (2003), and her more recent 2014 article.

<sup>2</sup> Oubrierie’s work with Marguerite Abouet on the series *Aya de Yopougon* can be seen as ‘[refusing] the invisible “single story” of Africa and instead [opening] the way for critical engagement with humorous depictions of gender constructions, sexual politics, and neocolonial class hierarchies in a progressive urban West African locale’ (McWilliams [2015, 46]).

<sup>3</sup> I am borrowing the term ‘experiencer’ from Bay-Cheng, Kattenbelt, Lavender and Nelson (2010).

<sup>4</sup> Sanders writes of ‘the inherent intertextuality of literature [encouraging] the ongoing, evolving production of meaning, and an ever-expanding network of textual relations’ (2006, 3).

<sup>5</sup> For a literary analysis of the image of the vortex/t and the poetics of turbulence, see Minahen 1992.

<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of the canon wars, and on the theorising of canon formation as changeable configurations or ‘constellations’ of elements, see E. Dean Kolbas, *Critical Theory and the Literary Canon* (Boulder: Westview, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> ‘Hideous progeny’ is potentialised from Shelley’s *Frankenstein* by Grossman (2015) as a key trope in her analysis of adaptation.

<sup>8</sup> On translinear and plurivectoral readings of non-fugitive comics images and comics as a network, see Groensteen (1999).

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<sup>9</sup> See Propst (2008) for an analysis of sexual violence as, paradoxically, a ‘potential catalyst for women’s self-empowerment’ in Marina Warner’s ‘disconcerting approach to sexual violence in fairy tales and myths’ (2008, 125).

<sup>10</sup> Malabou explores the political implications of resisting the ideological forces of capitalism, contrasting plasticity with flexibility, in *Que faire de notre cerveau?* (2004b).